

Lesson 1:

What is a poem?

In class we looked at the poem, “Homework! Oh Homework!” by Jack Prelutsky. Then, we tried to answer the question, “What makes a poem, a *poem*? Together, the class came up with an amazing list—rhyme, repetition, mood, short and long lines, speaker—were some of the qualities you listed.

In today’s lesson, let’s look at another poem and see what we can find.

1. Read the poem aloud
2. Circle words that rhyme
3. Underline words that are repeated
4. Highlight words that you don’t know and check the meaning in a dictionary.
5. How many lines are in the poem?
6. How many stanzas are in the poem?

Since Hanna Moved Away

The tires on my bike are flat.
The sky is grouchy gray.
At least it sure feels like that
Since Hanna moved away.

Chocolate ice cream tastes like prunes.
December's come to stay.
They've taken back the Mays and Junes
Since Hanna moved away.

Flowers smell like halibut.
Velvet feels like hay.
Every handsome dog's a mutt
Since Hanna moved away.

Nothing's fun to laugh about.
Nothing's fun to play.
They call me, but I won't come out
Since Hanna moved away.

-Judith Viorst

Please write your answers to the questions in complete sentences.

7. Who might be the narrator of the poem?

8. How would you describe the mood of the poem?

9. The poet says, “The sky is grouchy gray.” What does this tell you about the narrator’s feelings since Hanna moved away?

10. In your opinion, why does the speaker repeat the line “Since Hanna moved away.”?

Lesson 2:

Lines and line breaks

Lines are the building blocks of poems. Poets use short lines. Some poets use longer lines instead of shorter lines. Some poets begin lines at the left. Some poets push lines to the right. Some poets use lines to give their poem shape. The more poetry you read, the more you will notice how poets use lines. Line breaks are just as important as lines. Line breaks are used to control how you read a poem.

This is important, so I'll say it again:

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1. In the writing on the left, how do lines and line breaks change the text?

2. **Poetry Challenge:** Find 2-3 sentences from a piece of mail. In the box below, rewrite the sentences and make them look like a poem by using different line lengths and line breaks.

Lesson 3:

Stanzas

Stanzas are the groups of lines in a poem. As we talked about in class, stanzas are like “paragraphs” in a poem.

Stanzas can give a poem shape

Stanzas can give a poems structure.

Stanzas can create patterns in a poem.

Stanzas can create organization in a poem.

In today’s lesson, let’s look at how the poet, Portia Nelson, uses stanzas.

1. Read the poem aloud
2. Circles words that rhyme
3. Underline words that are repeated
4. Highlight words that you don’t know and check the meaning in a dictionary.
5. How many lines are in the poem?
6. How many stanzas are in the poem?

7. How does the poet use stanzas in this poem?

8. What story is the poet sharing with the reader?

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

Chapter I

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes me forever to find a way out.

Chapter II

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place
but, it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter III

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it's a habit.
my eyes are open
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

Chapter IV

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Chapter V

I walk down another street.

-Portia Nelson

Lesson 4:

Speaker or, *persona*

Every poem has a speaker. In poetry, we refer to the speaker as the *persona*.

Don't confuse the speaker of the poem with the author of the poem—that's the poet.

And don't confuse the speaker with the person who reads the poem aloud—that's the reader.

Here is a poem with an interesting speaker:

The Caterpillar

Under this loop of honeysuckle,
A creeping, colored caterpillar,
I gnaw the fresh green hawthorn spray,
I nibble it leaf by leaf away.

Down beneath grow dandelions,
Daisies, old-man's-looking-glasses;
Rooks flap croaking across the lane.
I eat and swallow and eat again.

Here come raindrops helter-skelter;
I munch and nibble unregarding:
Hawthorn leaves are juicy and firm.
I'll mind my business: I'm a good worm.

When I'm old, tired, melancholy,
I'll build a leaf-green mausoleum
Close by, here on this lovely spray,
And die and dream the ages away.

Some say worms win resurrection,
With white wings beating flitter-flutter,
But wings or a sound sleep, why should I care?
Either way I'll miss my share.

Under this loop of honeysuckle,
A hungry, hairy caterpillar,
I crawl on my high and swinging seat,
And eat, eat, eat—as one ought to eat.

-Robert Graves

Please write your answers to the questions in complete sentences.

1. Who is the speaker of the poem?

2. What story is the speaker telling the reader?

Lesson 5:

Free verse

As we learned in class, not all poems rhyme or follow rules. Poems that do not follow rules are free verse. Free verse is free from rhyming, repetition, even stanzas.

Because free verse poetry is free from rules, it is fun to write, but it can be difficult to read. Here's a free verse poem by e.e. cummings

in Just-

in Just-

spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wide

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the funny
old balloonman whistles
far and wide
and bettyandisabel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and
it's
spring
and

the
funny-footed

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wide

by e. e. cummings

1. This poem by e.e. cummings breaks many of the rules of poetry. What are some of the rules that he breaks? What do you notice?

Lesson 6:

Theme

We learned that in fiction, the theme of a story is the life lesson, or the message the author wants to share with the reader.

The same is true of poetry. Poetry is personal, and poets use language to show how they feel about their topic.

Do you remember the book, *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson? In the book there was a fence that separated the girl's backyards. But, the fence also stood for something bigger; the fence was a symbol for the laws of segregation that kept the girls from being friends.

In this poem by student Grace Walton, the swingset represents, or symbolizes, her childhood and the memories created around the swingset.

The Swingset

Wood rots,
ropes fray,
metal rusts,
memories stay.

It stands there deserted.
Sometimes it was a ship
escaping from a storm.
Other times, many times,
It was the Toyota minivan, a friend and I
drove to McDonald's.

Now years of playing end.
It's just the goal for flashlight tag,
where people cry after losing
or brag after winning.

At times I want to shed
my childhood,
but somehow I can't cart it away
to the dump, where
swingsets are shredded, where
time past
can't ever
return.

-Grace Walton

1. In this poem, the speaker's backyard swingset represents her childhood.

In the last stanza, the speaker says "I can't cart it away to the dump where swingsets are shredded, where time past can't ever return."

How do you think the speaker feels about growing-up? What evidence do you have from the poem?

2. In your opinion, what is the theme, or the life lesson, of this poem?

Lesson 7:

Imagery

One of the most powerful things a poet can use is imagery. Imagery is sensory language, or language that appeals to a reader’s sense of sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch. Imagery helps create pictures in the reader’s mind mental images and visualize the story or poem.

This poem by student Ben Williams is an example of how a poet uses language to produce imagery, or a picture in our mind.

Deer Print

A soft indentation—
two toes—
marks the ground,
a blank reminder
of what has been here before me.
I try to feel amazed,
to marvel at this muddy imprint,
to feel lucky at my chance to notice—
but I want to see the deer,
steam streaming from her nostrils
as she stares at me,
thin legs threatening to give way,
small brown head
trembling in the cold.
I want to see her bound away,
her tail high in the air,
her two-toed hooves
marking the ground.

-Benjamin Williams

1. What senses does this poem appeal to—sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.

This next poem by student Nora Bradford also uses language to appeal to the reader’s senses.

Watermelon

I watch Mom cut five slices,
Then I take the largest and the reddest.
When I sink my teeth into solid juice,
The melon squirts its fireworks.

I swallow a seed—
that’s one I won’t spit
into the bowl
beyond the deck railing.

When I finish the delightful redness
I throw the green rind to Hob,
who waits his turn.
He grabs the crust in his mighty jaws

and runs away
With its sweetness.

-Nora Bradford

2. What senses does this poem appeal to—sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.

Lesson 8:

Alliteration

As we learned in class, alliteration is the repeated sound of the first consonant. We used the tongue-twister “*She sells seashells by the seashore*” to show how sounds repeat.

In these two poems, you can see how poet Valerie Worth uses alliteration to create a pleasing sound with syllables that slide smoothly when you say them.

1. Read each poem aloud
2. Underline beginning sounds that are repeated

sea lions

the satin sea lions
nudge each other
toward the edge
of the pool until
they fall like
soft boulders
into the water,
sink down, slide
in swift circles,
twist together
and apart, rise again
snorting, climb
up slapping
their flippers on
the wet cement:
someone said
that in all the zoo
only the sea lions
seem happy.

fence

The old fence
Has fallen down,
A pile of gray
Rails resting
In the grass.

Where are all
The cows now,
That leaned
Hard there,
Hoping to get out?

Have they pushed
Through, and walked
Down the road,
Past all the fences
Forever?

3. **Poetry Challenge:** Using Valerie Worth’s poems for inspiration, choose from these lists of alliterative words to create 3 poems of your own OR create your own list and write 3 poems.

- children, chipmunk, chomp, chase, chestnuts
- donut, delicious, day, dunk, during, destroy
- parrot, park, person, party, play, pretend
- wind, welcome, west, wise, whistle, when
- teacher, tell, trash, toys, timid, total, together
- fly, flop, fling, flow, flounder, flag, flash, flip
- last, long, little, list, lovely, lake, lonely

Here’s my attempt at alliteration using the first list of words (and a few more!):

The small children play in the park
Smiling and chasing chipmunks
Who would rather rest and
Chomp on chestnuts
Than
be
chased.

-Ms. Mariani

Lesson 9:

Assonance and consonance

In Valerie Worth's poem "fences" we looked at alliteration—beginning sounds that are repeated in the poem. But, did you notice that some ending sounds are also repeated?

Take a look:

fence

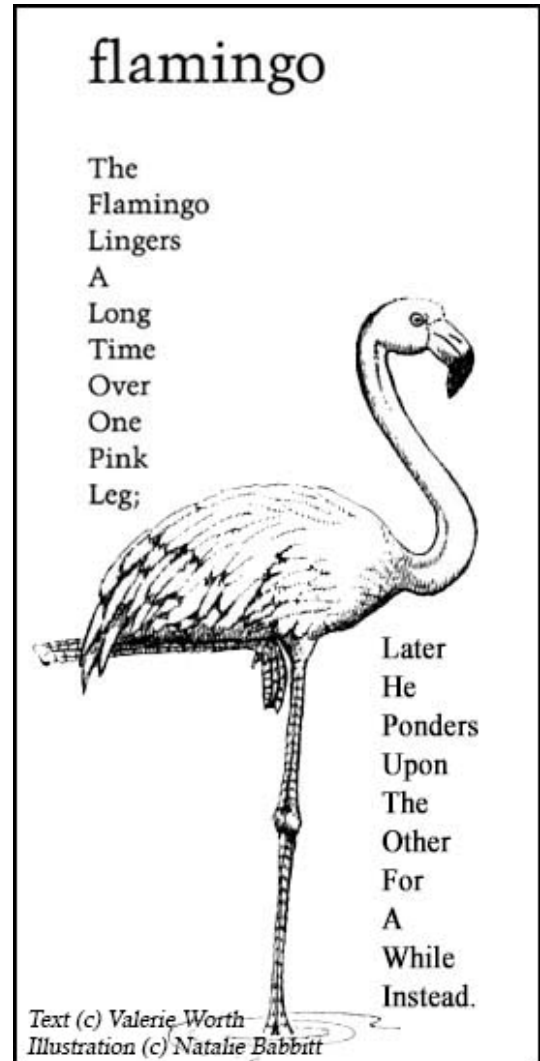
The old fence
Has fallen **down**,
A pile of gray
Rails resting
In the grass.

Where are all
The **cows now**,
That **leaned**
Hard there,
Hoping to get **out**?

Have they pushed
Through, and walked
Down the road,
Past all the fences
Forever?

When sounds are repeated in the middle or end of words, it is called assonance or consonance. The "ow" sound at the end of cow, now, and out are repeated vowel sounds; this is assonance. The "ed" and "t" sounds at the end of leaned, pushed, and walked are repeated consonant sounds; this is consonance.

Here's another poem by Valerie Worth that uses alliteration, but also uses assonance and consonance. See if you can spot it!



1. What examples of assonance or consonance can you identify in the poem "flamingo?"

Lesson 10:

Simile and metaphor

Simile and metaphor are two other ways that poets use language in poems. Actually, simile and metaphor aren't just used by poets; they are used by authors to make literature more vivid, exciting, and powerful. In the book, *The Tiger Rising*, author Kate DiCamillo often uses simile and metaphor in her descriptions. For example, on page 23 of the book, DiCamillo writes about Rob, "He opened his mouth and the words fell out, one on top of the other, *like gold coins*."

In that sentence, the author is using simile, comparing Rob's words to gold coins. In her sentence the author uses the word like, in her comparison: words are like gold coins.

In the poem below, poet Valerie Worth uses the word 'like' and the word 'as' when describing shoes:

shoes

Which to prefer?
Hard leather heels,
Their block carved
Thick, like rocks,
Clacked down
Waxed wooden stairs,

Or the pale soles
Of sneakers,
Word smooth, soft
As mushroom caps,
Supple upon warm
Summer pavements?

1. Here, the poet compares the heels and soles of shoes to things that have nothing to do with shoes. But, the comparison helps create a picture in the reader's mind. Can you find the similes in the poem?

Metaphor also uses the power of comparison to help create a picture in the mind of the reader. The difference is that metaphor does not use the words 'like' or 'as' to create that image. In this clever poem by Valerie Worth, see how the poet uses metaphor in her comparison of a safety pin:

safety pin

Closed, it sleeps
On its side
Quietly,
The silver
Image
Of some
Small fish;

Opened, it snaps
Its tail out
Like a thin
Shrimp, and looks
At the sharp
Point with a
Surprised eye.

2. **Poetry Challenge:** Can you create a four-stanza poem about the four seasons?

Here's my attempt creating a free verse poem with metaphor and simile:

In spring the rain is wet fingers,
Drops tickling my face.

The summer sun is the light bulb,
And I am the moth. Don't get too close!

The crunch of autumn leaves is like
A thousand candy wrappers scattered on the grass.

In winter, the snow is a white blanket
Covering everything that has color.

-Ms. Mariani